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By-Farnsworth, Clayton

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The principal of the Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical Center at Las Vegas, Nevada, briefly outlines its development and function. The facility cost approximately 3 million dollars and was built on 390 acres of land purchased from the Federal government. The PERT method was used in planning. Instructional facilities, including those for auto body repair, auto mechanics, culinary arts, and educational TV center, serve some 350 high school students and about 650 adults as well as those post-high school students in the Manpower program. Public relations methods in this fast growing population area are emphasized. (HH)

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THE BIRTH OF A NEW VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL CENTER

Mr. Clayton Farnsworth, Principal
Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical Center
Las Vegas Nevada

While generally in education it's not often the case that people who are going to open a new school have the privilege of being placed on the job well in advance of the opening date, I was assigned as principal a year and a half prior to the arrival of any students. This, I think, was good for the school and certainly was good for me. Total planning involved putting the center into general operation. We were working against a deadline to finalize the building plans.

My first responsibility, therefore, was in working with the architect to bring this about. From the very inception of the idea, there had been a close working relationship with the people of the community, the school system and the architect, as well as the staff of the State Department of Education. I resolved to do all I could to maintain this type of relationship with the people by forming advisory committees. In the process, 16 advisory committees of important people were created representing management and labor drawn from areas to be reflected in the training programs that we would be teaching at the vocational technical center. These people were encouraged to suggest ideas that we could incorporate into the total plans both architecturally and educationally.

The facility, as it now stands, represents an expenditure of approximately 3 million dollars. We were bound by

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this amount so that when advisory committee members made some rather elaborate suggestions, it was necessary to point out this limitation. Consequently, while we accepted many of the recommendations that these people made, it was also necessary to turn down some of them. However, the facility will eventually include many of the committee's ideas in one of its later construction phases. While wanting to work with these advisory committees, we were also interested in bringing in as many suggestions from instructors as possible, even though all instructors had not been selected. We also talked to many of the people who were currently employed in the school district in positions of vocational-technical education.

Upon entering the facility one sees only two areas that are now permanently located. This is so because of the flexibility built into the structure as part of the total master plan. Both the Auto Body and the Auto Mechanics area will remain as they are now situated in the final phases. The Culinary Arts area, likewise, will remain as a permanent component. All of the rest of the areas in the present facility will ultimately be located in different settings as called for in the master plan.

We have on our campus about 390 acres. This was an expensive piece of land. If you were to price some of it you would find that even sage brush land sells for from $3,000 to $5,000 an acre. Luckily, however, as the school facility people were making advance planning for the location of

various schools, they happened to learn that this was Federal land, and so instead of paying $3,000 to $5,000 an acre, this land wound up costing us $2.50 an acre. It proved to be quite a savings to us.

By 1985 we'll have three quarters of a million people in Clark County, or about three times the population that we now have. This area, desolate as it may seem to be now, will have 200,000 people located around it in less than 20 years. We were looking ahead not only from the perspective of facility planning, but also 15 years in the future with its attendant population growth. For these reasons and many others we thought it essential that the school board engage someone to put into operation many of the details that have been worked out at the Center. Without such an on-site coordinator many of the things that we wanted incorporated into the building would not be there when it opened or even later in the future.

We employed a type of planning that is carried on primarily in industry, the PERT planning or the critical path method, and we felt that it was important to establish a definite direction of planning. Most educational facilities are put into operation in a haphazard manner, with the individuals who are chosen to operate the school being chosen just a month or two before the school actually goes into operation. We sought to eliminate much of the guesswork that previously had gone into the opening of new schools. Responsibility areas were determined with each of the various departments of our school district. For example, we were

concerned with the personnel department, the curriculum department, with student selection, with public information, and with purchasing. So we went to each of these departments and established with them a flow sheet on which we determined who was going to be responsible for specific planning in bringing this facility into operation. We established with them an understanding of what their job would be and from this we drew up a PERT plan indicating responsibility areas for everybody in the departments involved. Afterwards we asked each department to develop its own network and its PERT plans of operation so that they could bring all planning together. Opening a new facility puts a tremendous strain on the personnel in the administration and this farming out of responsibility tends to ease the strain. The facility still has areas that we have not yet put into operation. Some planned programs, most notably the Air Frame and Power Plant sections, we were unable to start because equipment was not available.

One indication of the value of flexibility is in our Automotive display section. Very abruptly we received a directive from the Superintendent that our Educational TV would henceforth be located at the Vocational Technical Center. With very little effort we are now in the process of putting in the module walls which will complete the transformation of that section of the facility into Clark County's newest TV center. The type of planning that has gone into this facility permits us, as we find programs that are not of value, to move them out, replacing them with more suitable

ones.

We have also been working quite successfully with the Manpower program. We found that Manpower had a lot of available equipment. We were able to move some of the Manpower equipment into our facility in exchange for the use of our educational plant. We now have about $250,000 to $300,000 worth of equipment that belongs to the Manpower program that's being used by those people on a part-time basis. We, on the other hand, use it during times when it would otherwise be idle.

In our facility right now, though we only opened this academic year, we're starting some classes at 7 o'clock in the morning, with others that are ending at 11 o'clock at night. There are approximately 350 high school students in our program. Pooling the Manpower groups with post-high school students, we have had about 650 adults during our first year of operation. Altogether, our facility has touched over 1,000 people. Next year we will boost enrollment to approximately 700 or 800 high school students, with an equal number of adults. Later, when we go into the second phase of our operation we plan to accommodate approximately 1500 students; and as we expand into additional phases of the program, we are thinking in terms of 5,000 high school students and approximately 7,000 adults. Some of these, of course, will be part-time students, but many will be full-time people embarked on two-year training programs.

One aspect of initiating a vocational-technical center involved public relations. We felt that we had to establish

a proper image to place before the people of our community. Part of this was achieved through a vocational-technical conference. Yet many adults were initially opposed to the thought that their son would take training which ultimately would result in him carrying a lunch pail to work. We realized that we had to dignify the world of work as far as vocational-technical education was concerned, and this was attempted through an extensive public relations program. We also felt that such public relations for the Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical Center should be continuous; that there must be a constant flow of well-prepared information reaching the public. Nor should it be a one man operation, but rather a cooperative effort of the teachers, administrators, counselors and all personnel concerned with vocational technical education.

To do all this effectively it was essential to have full cooperation from the established public relations program of the entire school district. We set out to acquaint the people with what we were attempting to do. One very encouraging thing about this was that as we went into the schools and started to talk to some of these people we found real enthusiasm from the students. While the students saw the need for this type of training, when they went home they were confronted with the attitude that vocational education is a second rate type of education. This is a stance that any of you who are not already in this type of program are going to encounter somewhere in your community. When we finally

got the school open, with students attending classes, and tours coming through, then the people, both young and old alike, began to say, "Well, golly, we don't have to go to college to have a fine educational facility. Nor do we have to go to college in order to experience people treating us as adults and giving us an opportunity." One boy said he thought the Southern Nevada Vocational-Technical Center was an old warehouse that had been taken over and was being used for vocational training. This, unfortunately, is the type of picture that most people have of vocational education. This is why we continue to be concerned with building public relations. I suppose that the best public relations we're going to have is when these young people go out on the job. We welcome that prospect because they are genuinely proud of their school. I say to these young people, "I'm not giving any teacher supervisory duty in this school. Every one of you has the responsibility of your own discipline. If you can't behave and conduct yourself as a young man or a young woman, we'll ask you to leave because we don't feel we can recommend you for the world of work."

We feel that we've established a fine image this first year even with a small group of students. As we bring more people into the program, we are confident that we can continue to dignify the image of vocational-technical education to the point where we can make it important not only to our community, but to the young people who are going to be a part of it.